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“Helping Others Grow”

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Botanical Gardens to Love

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A few years back, my husband and I and several friends took a 3 day repositioning cruise from San Diego to Vancouver. We took the cruise to do a little pelagic birding - looking for birds like storm petrels, shearwaters and others that spend most of their lives on the open seas and only come to land to breed. Unfortunately, we spent most of our 3 days in our cabin due to high seas and storms.

In stark contrast, the arrival to Vancouver was breath-taking. What a beautiful city. But the best was yet to come – a tour of Butchart Gardens located in Victoria on Vancouver Island, a short ferry ride from Vancouver.

In the early 1900s, Jennie Butchart had a vision of transforming the abandoned limestone quarry that had been part of her husband’s business. Little by little, top soil was brought in and over time, it was transformed into the gardens of today. It consists of 55 acres, 50 full-time gardeners, 900 bedding plant varieties and 26 greenhouses. There are several garden themes – Rose, Mediterranean, Italian, Japanese and a Sunken Garden.

Nothing prepared me for Butchart Gardens. I had heard it was definitely a garden to be visited but I had no idea of its scope. Starting from the Visitors Center, you follow a path through lovely though not overly remarkable gardens. Suddenly you turn a corner and are greeted by the breathtaking Sunken Gar-

den, the jewel of the gardens for sure. The beauty of the garden is not just in the plants themselves but in the overall expanse with meandering paths. The Ross Fountain in the back of the garden deserves some time to appreciate the full display it puts on. (I think it is difficult to describe the beauty of the Sunken Garden. Please see the photos included in this article to get some sense of its grandeur.)

You may be inclined to spend all your time in the Sunken Garden but the other gardens are certainly worth your time. Not only are they beautiful on their own, they are also the most meticulously tended gardens that I have ever seen. I didn’t see one weed in all of the 55 acres.

One small criticism is that there were no plant markers so some plants went unidentified. There were many plants I was not familiar with and the lack of signage didn’t help. However, in the gift shop, there was a counter devoted to plants currently in bloom in the gardens, with cut flowers and information on each.

The gardens are still family-owned and run today. With over a million visitors each year, the gardens have been designated a National Historic Site of Canada. More information on the gardens can be found at www.butchartgardens.com. This garden should definitely be on your bucket list.



Far left: Staircase leading down to the Sunken Garden. Center: Sunken Garden. Above: Ross Fountain.

All photos: Tom Becker, SMG husband
